

# CONGENIAL

**Connecting Generations:  
Intergenerational learning for a more  
inclusive Europe**



**TITLE: CONGENIAL. Connecting Generations: intergenerational learning for a more inclusive Europe**

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## INTRODUCTION (by Glenda Galeotti<sup>1</sup>)

This e-book represents the main product of *Connecting Generation, CONGENIAL*, an EU project, namely a LLP learning partnership, carried out by Institutions and Organizations from eight European countries plus Turkey. The realm of the project is lifelong learning and in particular Adult Education and intergenerational learning. In an ageing Europe, the project aimed at promoting innovative educational methods and processes to foster communication and understanding between different generations<sup>2</sup>.

The main project activities were, on the one hand, testing of educational interventions aimed at young and old learners in order to support learning experimentation based on intergenerational exchange. The strategy pointed at forging new tools for promotion of youth participation and elderly social inclusion in local communities. On the other hand, all involved partners worked in their local territories, and in international synergy, for the production and sharing of knowledge, methods and educational practices that could lead to a better quality of education and training for all ages. Connecting Generation had been conceived in 2011 in view of 2012 EU year for Active Ageing and as a brick toward Europe 2020 strategy framework on inclusive growth.

In the Europe of knowledge and technology, despite the richness and diversity of economic and cultural heritages, a large slice of senior and young citizens, for opposite reasons, live at the margins of the production system, outside the labor market and are at high risk of social exclusion. Intergenerational solidarity, support and cooperation among individuals of different ages, is key toward realizing a society where people can develop their capabilities and potential, can benefit from the economic and social progress of their communities, according to a logic of fairness<sup>3</sup>.

Consistently with the priorities of Lifelong Learning Programme/Grundtvig of the European Commission, one of the main expected results of the project was to improve and upgrade the professional skills of adult education actors, foster their professional development and guarantee the quality of educational services provided by the organizations involved<sup>4</sup>.

In fact it is everyday more important that operators reinforce knowledge and skills they employ in their education work, including abilities to read, to interpret and to act in news cultural, social and economic scenarios. Without that, they cannot be prepared enough to perceive and respond to the challenges that Europe as a whole will be facing in the coming years.

Although the definition of adult education adopted by the LLP Program is very broad and includes not only formal qualification courses, but also non-formal learning activities or outreach and informal learning environments, training in adulthood is not just a peculiar activity

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<sup>2</sup> The project was supported by Learning Partnership of Grundtvig - Lifelong Learning Program of European Union. For details of the partnership see list of participants in Annex.

<sup>3</sup> European Year for Active Ageing and Solidarity between Generations, 2011 [http://www.age-platform.eu/images/stories/23781\\_brochure\\_everyone2012\\_A5\\_IT.pdf](http://www.age-platform.eu/images/stories/23781_brochure_everyone2012_A5_IT.pdf) consulted 20/01/2015

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.programmallp.it/index.php?id\\_cnt=131](http://www.programmallp.it/index.php?id_cnt=131) consulted 20/01/2015

in individual life. On the contrary, it represents the primary resource for social and political action of communities and States, in order to promote inclusion of all citizens<sup>5</sup>.

*Connecting Generations* was meant, therefore, to involve young and elder in training activities focused on "working together", "learning together" and "learning from each other". Such an approach is mutually beneficial for acquiring new skills and knowledge, sharing values, understanding and strengthening mutual respect. The overall result are more cohesive communities. "Intergenerational learning, aims to develop dialogue and solidarity among social groups united by the increasingly widespread condition of exclusion from a society based on productivity and efficiency<sup>6</sup>.

Within this framework, the design of *Connecting Generations* is characterized by a specific learning vision of and the strategic role played by non profit associations to make Lifelong Learning a concrete resource for local communities.

Shared construction of knowledge, according to an approach that moves from the individual to the context in which it interacts, makes learning the front door of social innovation. In this scenario, associations, and civil society more generally, are considered the most appropriate partners to build more cohesive and fairer societies.

In terms of methodological criteria, the project as a whole promoted experiential participatory learning: both adult educators consolidated their knowledge, attitudes and competences as educators and in the contents and methods applied to the educational activities carried out by them.

The educational intentionality of the project was developed through local initiatives aimed at promoting lifelong learning for young and elder people in shared spaces, regardless of socio-economic background. The focus was on social inclusion of the elder through the enhancement of their knowledge and a renewed effort to strengthen mutual knowledge and respect. the generational link, with young people. This intentionality was also shared at the international partnership level, where peer to peer analysis and reflection on the ongoing experiences, developed in particularly during transnational mobilities, was a pillar for cooperation between different organization. It also guaranteed quality assurance of education and training system.

As part of the project, EDAFORUM, in collaboration with the University of Firenze, coordinated a qualitative study of educational interventions made by the organizations involved. The objective was to trace the peculiarities and define the characters of methodological innovation, in terms of an educational transformative action.<sup>7</sup> Starting from the educational practices implemented, this analysis of practices has matured into a critical-reflexive co-construction of knowledge route, that contributed to define a shared repertoire of intergenerational education practices. That also represented a training space for adult educators of partner organizations.

The research methodology included direct involvement of all operators, who provided data and evidences for their validation. The common reflection happened during 9 international meetings, during which the various educational experiences have been the subject of analysis and reflection. Operators also created thematic focus groups, on memory, participation, arts,

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<sup>5</sup> A. Alberici (2002), *Prospettive epistemologiche*, in Demetrio D. (eds.), *Istituzioni di Educazione degli Adulti*, Milano, Guerini Scientifica.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.age-platform.eu/age-policy-work/solidarity-between-generations/campaign/928-useful-links-publications-and-documents->

<sup>7</sup> This project action is realized by EdaForum in collaboration with the Department of Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Florence.

traditional knowledge just to mention a few, and compiled sheets for collection and analysis of data. All this has been possible thanks to the role of researchers and experts in the field that offered their expertise free of charge.

The research began with a preliminary investigation on already existing educational experiences that promote intergenerational dialogue, with the aim of identifying some useful criteria to assess and compare the interventions of adult education carried out by the project partners<sup>8</sup>.

The same criteria were used to construct an analysis sheet of educational practices implemented by educators/teachers/operators in the local communities where the organizations operate. The tool has been presented in Turkey in March 2013, at a very early stage of project implementation. A series of elements to allow practices' comparison has been identified by researchers<sup>9</sup>. The next stage of the investigation was data collection on educational activities/practices carried out by organizations (the analysis also took place through focus groups with local operators) and on joint activities of the international partnership (analysis of the records and reports of international meetings), then moved on to the decoding of the above according to the method of "content analysis"<sup>10</sup>.

This involved the identification of analytical units, such as results of inferential processes, and then the decoding of the aggregations of data according to two criteria: the first described the activities in specific operational contexts; the second detected the relationship between the key elements that characterize the activity under investigation. The results of this process have been assessed and validated, together with those of the project, with the focus groups with all international partners in the last meeting in Poland in May 2014.

The products of the different phases of the investigation were included in this publication. The first part begins with the illustration of the problem addressed by the project, or the identification of adult education needs in Europe, with reference to intergenerational learning and solidarity, defining the framework in which the activities took place.

The second chapter describes how the project Connecting Generations, in promoting active aging through specific educational activities is part of the European strategies for lifelong learning, in the framework of the Lifelong Learning Programme and later Erasmus Plus. This also contains the results of the qualitative research that has accompanied the project activities, and in particular, of the comparison between the educational practices realized for the construction of a shared vision of intergenerational education and lesson learned through local and international project experiences.

The second part of the volume collects the work of operators and educators, descriptions of adult education activities carried out by organizations in their communities and of some educational methods - Study Circles, the Word Café and Paideia Clubs - used to promote communication between the generations.

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<sup>8</sup> This research phase was conducted by Dr. Amerigo Bernardi for his Master's thesis. See Bernardi A., *Imvecchiamento attivo, dialogo intergenerazionale e trasmissione di Saperi. Buone pratiche e linee di sviluppo*, Master's Degree in "Operator for local human development, culture of peace and international cooperation", University of Florence, AY 2012-2013.

<sup>9</sup> The plan for the documentation of educational practices implemented and the analysis sheet were shared during the first international meeting in Afyon, Turkey in March 2013 and then revised and updated during the continuation of the project.

<sup>10</sup> R. Semeraro (2011), *L'analisi qualitativa dei dati della ricerca in educazione*, "Giornale Italiano della Ricerca Educativa" 4(7), p.97-106.

## 2.2 Connecting Generations (Congenial) Learning Partnership: creating common practices and a shared visions in intergenerational education (by Glenda Galeotti)

This section presents the main results of project documentation, through the analysis, comparison and evaluation of intergenerational education practices, realized by each organization involved and shared within the international partnership.

Such activity has assumed the character of a qualitative research, where the object of investigation was the educational processes that involved youth and adults, while its aim was to make explicit complexity of the contexts in which they occurred, to define elements of methodological innovation, in terms of transformative educative action<sup>51</sup>.

In this framework, the construct of educational practice is central, coherently with complex actions that want to achieve an educational purpose, or, in other words, an activity consists of actions and choices intentionally made to achieve one or more learning objectives. The key feature of educational practice, compared to other types of practices, is the special relationship between the educator, or educators, and learner, or learners.

In CONGENIAL, such an educational relationship aimed at the construction of intergenerational dialogue and the enhancement of positive resources that young and old citizens can offer to each other and to the communities where they belong

To read and de-construct a practice means, in fact, to make explicit its constituent elements, to bring out less visible dynamics, to be able to report the empirical evidence, in short to provide a feedback from data collected in the field in order to guide the process of understanding and interpretation<sup>52</sup>.

The focus is not so much on the result or the product achieved, but on the processes that have been activated and their dynamics, the system of shared meanings, the methods of interpretation and intervention on concrete phenomena. Following Gregory Bateson, each practice can be understood as a system and therefore from a point of view which is qualitatively different, definable as "meta" with respect to the internal properties of its structure, a meta-structure or the structure of structures that are connected<sup>53</sup>.

According to an integrated logic, the analysis of CONGENIAL educational practices was carried out, at the level of the international project group, to know complex dynamics of education: how educators act in certain contexts, and to achieve certain goals; central was also the meanings attributed to the actions realized, hopes and expectations that animated them, all tacit knowledge involved. Overall the methodology was questioning and problematizing in order to improve practices and to define new models of quality education.

Thanks to a set of criteria identified by a preparatory study on similar activities and interventions<sup>54</sup>, research has developed a comparative analysis of the educational activities

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<sup>51</sup> This project action has been realized by Edaforum in collaboration with the Department of Science of Education and Psychology, University of Florence

<sup>52</sup> C. Laneve (2005), *Analisi della pratica educativa. Metodologia e risultanze della ricerca*, La Scuola, Brescia; Roig Vila, R., Laneve, C. (eds. 2011), *La pratica educativa nella società dell'informazione. L'innovazione attraverso la ricerca*, Brescia, La Scuola Editrice.

<sup>53</sup> G. Bateson (1979), *Mind and Nature. A Necessary Unity*, Dutton, New York.

<sup>54</sup> Qualitative research began with a preliminary survey of existing and educational experiences aimed at encouraging dialogue between generations, to identify some key indicators to assess and compare the CONGENIAL actions of adult education. With these indicators, we have built a form to collect information and data on the experiences, to make a systematic account of the educational practices, from some fields and criteria



carried out, which share the same initial problem - the dialogue between generations - within the same area of intervention - adult education - for the development of a shared methodology.

The theoretical assumptions of this qualitative study are that the fundamental way of knowledge building is essentially linked to the direct experience of the subjects, and much of the learning comes from practice. Human beings face similar situations trying to select the solutions and procedures that proved more effective in the past and adapting them to the new task to perform<sup>55</sup>.

One must also consider that often experiential learning is distinguished by its experimental character and a significant part of tacit knowledge, and therefore, greater awareness of action can be produced by introducing reflective and comparative moments on experiences. Reflexivity is based on repertoire of cases and experiences of the past that allow to act on assumptions and to move into problematic situations, identifying possible solutions<sup>56</sup>; instead the comparison relates to production of knowledge through the detection of similarities and differences between those situations that are under lens.

Both of these processes allow reaching a higher level of knowledge, thanks to:

- the comparison between different points of view that allows the transition from the subjective dimension to inter-subjective validation of acquired knowledge<sup>57</sup>;
- the overcoming of the false idea to formulate general laws and theories that can be applicable in every context,
- that mechanic transfer of knowledge is not possible because what we know is the result of a unique understanding of a specific situation<sup>58</sup>.

A certain degree of replicability and scalability is related to understanding actions undertaken in different contexts and their fundamental characteristics. That can make interventions recognizable outside and comparable with similar experiences. So the analysis of practices that a specific professional community realizes, as in the case of Connecting Generation, intends to find their own features and identify common elements that can revise the theoretical and/or methodological models of reference: from a significant number of experiences that have been valued positively a sort of meta-model can emerge, as a basis for the definition of "good practices".

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that make them comparable with each other. The operators involved in educational activities have carried out the compilation of the form through a group effort that involves three basic steps: the description of the activity, the analysis of some of its features, the interpretation/reflection on the elements that define the activity itself. The activity description is primarily to provide some qualitative data to narrow the experience (title, objectives, target, duration, etc.); the analysis phase focuses on three main elements: the learning needs of participants, networks enabled by the implementation of activities, the educational methodology adopted. In particular, the training needs are identified with the analysis of the context at two levels: the demographic changes in European society, the youth issue and other social challenges that Europe is facing; the specificity that these changes acquire in different countries involved in the project. In the third and last step of reflection on educational practices implemented, operators have reinterpreted activities from some key concepts to highlight their intergenerational and innovation elements, to check the consistency of the results achieved with objectives proposed, to define the learning of the operators in the specific educational sector. The results of data analysis have been validated in a participatory way through local and international focus groups, that have involved representatives and members of all the partner organizations.

<sup>55</sup> J. Dewey (1933), *How we think*, Heath, Boston.

<sup>56</sup> D. A. Schön (1983), *The Reflective Practitioner: How professionals think in action*, Temple Smith, London

<sup>57</sup> L. Mortari (2009), *Ricercare e riflettere. La formazione del docente professionista*, Roma, Carocci; L. Fabbri, M. Striano, C. Malacarne (2008), *L'insegnante riflessivo. Coltivazione e trasformazione delle pratiche professionali*, Milano, Franco Angeli; M. Striano (2001), *La razionalità riflessiva nell'agire educativo*, Napoli, Liguori Editore.

<sup>58</sup> A. Calvani (eds., 2007), *Fondamenti di didattica. Teoria e prassi dei dispositivi formativi*, Carocci Editore, Roma.

A good practice means a clear, practical and sustainable solution to address a specific educational problem, in a given context, with a specific learning goal: usually it is a method or technique that has been more successful than others, but that may be susceptible to further developments through the experience.

Although it is not automatically replicable, a good practice can be a model to follow that integrates professional skills and knowledge with the best available empirical evidence to support the learning processes. Given the characteristics of CONGENIAL partner organizations, the contexts where they operate and the heterogeneity of the activities carried out, the possibility of generalization and transfer will not involve "whole practices", but rather some of their segments which however may stimulate discussion with other stakeholders who faces similar challenges.

From the analysis of collected data with the qualitative survey, therefore, it is possible to have a shared description of intergenerational education, declined in its basic elements and that highlights some methodological and operational criteria.

Starting from the objectives pursued by CONGENIAL's activities, a first definition of intergenerational education highlights its strongly social mark. In the development and support to dialogue and mutual understanding between generations, this education contributes: to fighting social, cultural and technological isolation and marginalization, to recalling and sharing memories, values, cultural and local heritage among generations in order to improve the quality of life in the local community.

One of the objectives of intergenerational education, on the side of the research, is to experience innovative practices, methods and activities of intergenerational learning in formal, non-formal and informal education. A vision of learning as a means of social and community cohesion emerges, rather than being geared exclusively to individual development: the exchange of knowledge between older and younger is central to counter marginalization, in particular, but not only, technological marginalization, and at the same time to enhance the traditional knowledge of older generations in training of young people. In reference to the target of intergenerational education, there are no specific restrictions, except those relating to a consistent choice of beneficiaries with respect to educational and social goals to achieve. In addition to training of trainers on specific methodologies, CONGENIAL's educational activities involved two types of beneficiaries:

- Direct target: children, youth, seniors, university students, volunteers, who live in a common territory and share common interests or problems of social inclusion, identity, solidarity.
- Indirect target: educators, high school teachers, primary and pre-primary teachers, university early researchers, policy makers, families, members and activists of partner organizations.

In line with intergenerational educational objectives, we could identify social, educational and community needs. In particular, with the first group we refer to phenomena of social and generational isolation that affect young and old, especially drop outs, unemployed, socially excluded, computer illiterate, etc. Hence the need to strengthen knowledge and skills of learners, through educational opportunities that foster dialogue, exchange and daily interaction between people of different ages, sexes and ethnic origins.

From the point of view of educational needs, this type of intervention can be used to introduce elements of non-formal education and divergent thinking in formal education, especially for

youth with learning and adaptation difficulties to the school system. At the same time, this education meets specific training needs such as knowledge of a foreign language or ICT, particularly for the older generation, or for the acquisition of soft skills such as the ability to cooperate and collaborate, problem solving, etc. Then there is a knowledge need of methods and techniques of intergenerational education for educators that work in the formal, non-formal and informal sectors, including those on innovative technologies, such as e-mentor.

The third type of need, those of communities, refers to the loss of cultural identity, like local knowledge and expertise, which puts at risk the indispensable resources for endogenous development of the territories, and to the need of mutual understanding, active citizenship and solidarity to build fairer and more cohesive societies.

As for the educational methods used in CONGENIAL, teaching activities for stimulating dialogue between generations, each partner has worked on a specific proposal, defining their characteristics and testing their application procedures. These can be grouped into a few main categories, starting from the methodological approach that characterizes them, although many of these can belong to multiple groups. The table below proposes a classification of them based on the elements emerged from the activities experimented.

<b>Teaching Method</b>	<b>Educational Methodology of Reference</b>
Workshop	Learning by doing/action learning methodologies
Traditional Lectures Storytelling Historical Research Valuing local traditions	Biographical and Historiographical approach
Community Mapping World Café Paideia Club	Participatory methodologies
E-mentoring	E-learning through ICTs
Peer to peer learning Discussion Groups/Focus Group Learning Circles	Working group methodologies
Role play	Active and interactive methodologies

Moving on from the descriptive level of intergenerational education activities to one more interpretive about data collected in research, there are three reflection axes developed. The first one focuses on the main methodological and operational elements that create solidarity between generations. The second one concerns the most innovative elements of the experiences carried out. The third axis refers to the lessons learned from the partner organizations through the developed activities and intergenerational education.

Beyond the different educational methods used to build bridges between generations, the analysis shows that some methodological and operational criteria useful to define a methodological framework can extend to all activities carried out and bring them back to a common framework.

First, there is the required reading and interpretation of social and educational needs of participants, but also their expectations. The purpose of this initial activity is to create favorable conditions to pursue effective actions, to build cohesive work groups, to propose topics that affect all participants, capturing their attention and their motivation.

A second element concerns the reciprocity of learning and the enhancement of generational knowledge. The elders are the custodians of traditional knowledge and trades that are

disappearing and losing their value, especially among the younger generation. Their collaboration in educational activities aimed at youth can spread this knowledge and traditions, avoiding its loss. Likewise the young are able to offer in exchange their knowledge on non-traditional communication means linked to the digital world. This aspect leads to another element that characterizes intergenerational learning, as it was interpreted by CONGENIAL: it is the importance of "working together", as a formative moment based on practical testing of knowledge and on individual learning strongly linked to experiences of intergenerational dialogue.

In intergenerational education, the sharing of knowledge, thoughts, dreams and ideas, can be directed towards common objectives and/or planning projects that benefit the local community. In this sense, collecting vision of the local community of young and old, identifying common problems to be addressed through consultation, so that the voices of all generations are heard, can drive the collaboration and the joint working to find shared solution. This process helps to break down the barriers that prevent active participation, strengthening the sense of responsibility and leadership among young people and the elders. So, solidarity between generations is designed to enhance skills and knowledge on its territory, raise awareness about critical issues and local resources, identify new development opportunities. The sharing of information and the establishment of a community dialogue aimed at advancing their issues to local policy makers can increase motivation and active participation of citizens in the public affairs as well as their trust in democratic systems.

These elements decline intergenerational education according to some criteria that guide the actions of education and training, in addition to those that characterize the role of the trainer in this type of activity. First, the intergenerational trainer must be able to "facilitate" the intergenerational exchange process, which concerns acquisition by some participants of knowledge and expertise held by others, creating a virtuous reciprocity movement between the parties involved.

The trainer must be able to conduct sincere and deep discussions with the group of participants, so that they can experience active and mutual listening, for inclusion of different points of view and identification of shared solutions. This helps to achieve another aim of intergenerational education, i.e. the deconstruction of stereotypes and prejudices that separate generations in order to increase mutual respect.

Analysis of CONGENIAL's experiences shows the innovative values of intergenerational education at different levels, especially in non-formal adult education in the framework of lifelong learning. The first element relates to the dialogue between tradition and innovation using the knowledge and skills of older and younger people. This is the case in e-mentoring, where a group of elder educators have acquired computer and multimedia skills that allowed them to discover new channels of communication with young people, to restore their leadership role and to share knowledge and experiences<sup>59</sup>.

During the training in fact, if young people were able to appreciate the value of knowledge and stories of older people, these latter themselves had come to realize how important they are, even in the digital age, the maintenance of traditions and building bridges to transmit knowledge, memories and experiences that would otherwise be lost.

In order to share knowledge, the project used social media and other forms of digital communication that offer significant potential since they are widespread among the younger

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<sup>59</sup> See: *Sharing e-mentoring techniques with 50+ educators* (by TELOS Education & Consulting, Hungary)

generations<sup>60</sup>. The elderly, for their part, possess a load of information about historical events and local knowledge in danger of disappearing: their interaction is necessary to create the system of collection of this knowledge.

This store of informal knowledge, too, can become the object of formal education activities and educational institutions in particular, which are too often shut into their spaces, be they physical or educational, and are far from the different components of local society. Intergenerational learning can make study experiences more real, fun and exciting, especially for those students who have more difficulties in adapting to the system and learning at school, because it responds to basic needs, with a simple and understandable language, it puts everyone in a position of ease and avoids the hierarchy among "good" and "bad" students.

The activities experienced by CONGENIAL that go in this direction have also proven not only to promote intergenerational learning, but also intercultural openness. Contemporary society does not always allow young people to have easy access to their grandparents, or older people in general, and the stories of the past that they carry. This is especially true for young people who are in a foreign country and have lost contact with their elderly who remained at home, as well as having too superficial relationships with their parents, as they often work all day. Educational activities on food as a means of intergenerational and intercultural communication showed their powerful universal value and its strong cultural dimension intrinsic to human communities, as food represents a fundamental, vital, human need<sup>61</sup>.

Educational activities aimed at changing people and relationships in training contexts and community education experienced in CONGENIAL, also has effects on the welfare of the community and the quality of life of its inhabitants<sup>62</sup>.

In addition to the rediscovery of the values and local history, which could also become the subject of economic activities, such as the production of syrups with local herbs<sup>63</sup>, this educational work aims to develop and strengthen the skills of democracy and active participation, its public agora, thanks to the use of methods that favor the establishment of non-hierarchical and horizontal relationships between participants<sup>64</sup>. That allows everyone to voice their opinions, thoughts, ideas. Innovative methods and technologies tested in CONGENIAL are also useful to ensure the participation of cross-cutting areas of the local community (children, parents, families, the elderly, community leaders) decisions and projects that relate to the community itself and its well-being, as happened with the community maps<sup>65</sup>.

Monitoring training activities has shown how they were able to produce change in the persons who participated in the working group. Young people involved in the project have expressed a genuine interest in dialogue with older people, intrigued by the stories about their lives and experiences, especially when they were also given the opportunity to experience and get involved through practical activities. Even older people during the activities have become increasingly passionate and showed a high interest in telling their experiences and teaching young people their knowledge on crafts or other activities. This allowed elders to feel useful

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<sup>60</sup> See: *Intergenerational integration and memories for posterities* (by University of the Third Age in Bialystok, Poland)

<sup>61</sup> See: *Traditional food of La Spezia and Liguria: a pathway toward intergenerational learning* (by AIDEA La Spezia, Italy)

<sup>62</sup> See: *Romanian Paideia Clubs* (by Students Forum from Faculty of Education, Dimitrie Cantemir Christian University, Romania); *Life Coaching: practical personal life & education coaching to connecting generations* (by Mercan Uluslararası Gönüllüler Derneği, Turkey)

<sup>63</sup> See: *Intergenerational learning through preservation of traditional knowledge of homemade syrups* (by Posoški Razvojni Center, Slovenia)

<sup>64</sup> See: *World Café: a tool to open up meaningful dialogue between generations* (by Living Values In Education, Greece)

<sup>65</sup> See: *Connecting generations through Community Mapping* (by Merseyside Expanding Horizons, United Kingdom)

and reduce the feeling of loneliness that often accompanies their days; young and old generations, through education, have had the opportunity to gain confidence in themselves and in their abilities. Perhaps one of the most interesting results of the activities was the contribution to raise awareness and to create the conditions for the recognition of the indispensable role of the elderly for the proper relation of the younger generations, and vice versa: each of these two generations in fact possesses a wealth of knowledge and skills to provide to each other.

This exchange can have repercussions from the professional point of view of the participants, as in the case of teachers of a certain age, who, eager to connect with the younger generation outside the formal teaching process, but with little knowledge of the digital world, participated in a special training to become e-mentors. In this, as in other experiences of CONGENIAL, it is clear that ICT is now considered among the main obstacles to mutual understanding between different generations, it has become a tool of collaboration between generations: a bearer of knowledge regarding the media and contents to preserve and spread.

It is in this virtuous and fruitful exchange that Connecting Generation became more successful: it fostered self-esteem of young and old participants, as the protagonists of the activities, but also on the side of their training and professional educators who have participated in international mobilities and the activities carried out at their organizations.

Beyond the educational gains regarding the specificity of each of the activities carried out by the various adult education organizations, all educational paths have tried to develop the following skills:

- to adopt an attitude of active listening;
- to deconstruct prejudices and stereotypes;
- to communicate with people bearing different experiences;
- to use tools and spaces for democratic participation in the life of the local community;
- to cooperate and collaborate with others;
- to use ICT;
- proficiency in English language.

At the level of local working groups, one of the most significant results achieved was the establishment of positive dynamics within citizens, about their views, learning about the positive effects of collaboration, cooperation and intergenerational learning. Many of the experiences show that through respectful dialogue all the members of a social group, regardless of age, can harmoniously and creatively work together to achieve significant objectives. In particular, this occurred mainly in the working groups that involved teachers, students, seniors and educators / trainers and other members of the local community and civil society, who with their contribution contributed to open schools of different types and levels (colleges and universities) to the requests of a social complexity.

From the point of view of the local community, the added value of many of the practices implemented was to be significantly linked to it in different ways: through the opening of the institution, as in the case of school laboratories; assuming the local community, its needs and the identification of development proposals as the object of the training; using local history as a space for dialogue between people of different ages, professional backgrounds and different cultural origins; building networks of collaboration between the project activities and local organizations. This close integration of training activities within society makes possible a continuation and follow up to some of them after the closure of the project, further

encouraging the participation of citizens to carry forward and address the specific issues of the local working groups.

The impact of greater interaction between different generations in a geographically limited area mainly create knowledge about the communities and their own territory and its history, local problems faced by different generations, the increase of knowledge of services, opportunities and resources. Thus, education can support intergenerational social change in the community, through increased communication skills between young and old, a willingness to learn from each other and the establishment of a positive relationship with the natural environment and cultural reference, in terms of learning for sustainable development.

At the level of the international working group, which brought together members of the partner organizations of the project, the reflections inspired by the analysis and comparison of educational practices implemented, have assumed the character of a shared assessment of the activities carried that led to the following results:

- The definition of a common vision on intergenerational learning
- The identification of methodological operational criteria in non-formal adult education, in view of lifelong learning;
- The identification and systematization of "lessons learned" from the activities of the project
- The transfer of knowledge and practices among participating organizations
- The construction of a stable network between actors involved at local and international levels, for the realization of future projects.

In particular, the international working group has created a realistic learning community, whose members have been able to upgrade their skills and qualifications in non-formal adult education through the exchange of experiences during international mobilities, work research that accompanied the project and were made available to group work.

Even at this level of the structure of the project, therefore, a training program has been developed and demonstrated the added value of training for the qualification of human resources and for the construction of a European vision starting from specific local stories and experiences.

In conclusion, intergenerational education experienced within CONGENIAL revolves around two key concepts: caring for others as an educational key which is the basis of human experience and allows the establishment of adult identity<sup>66</sup>. Caring in education involves shared objectives from which to think about social and individual bonds. The other key concept is reciprocity that characterizes inter-generational learning, which is a fundamental process of alliance, networking, meeting and exchange of knowledge among citizens of different ages. In fact, they may experience inclusive paths through construction of educational relationships that animate the participation and cooperation between the different segments of the society.

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<sup>66</sup> G. Bertagna (2010), *Dall'educazione alla pedagogia. Avvio al lessico pedagogico*, La Scuola, Brescia, p. 39

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